

Appendix E. Summary of Focus Group Recommendations

January 2009

Students completing a voluntary on-line survey of York University students enrolled in evening and weekend courses were offered an opportunity to participate further in a Focus Group. We interviewed 25 students in this way. The following is a summary of their comments.

YORK'S COMMITMENT TO SUPPORTING EVENING/WEEKEND EDUCATION

York's Commitment

York should make a written commitment to offering complete degrees in the evening. It was recommended that York offer a few degrees which may be pursued in the evening. For these degrees, major/core and elective requirements should be offered in the 7 to 10 time slot. Additionally, courses should be available online and via correspondence.

The commitment requires support from administrators, faculty, and Schools/Departments/Divisions. Additionally, if the University is to scale back, evening degrees which have been guaranteed cannot be truncated.

Faculty Commitment to serve evening students

The Atkinson Centre for Mature and Part-time Studies should have links to each Faculty and each Faculty should list degrees/programs/courses which can be pursued in the evening/on a part-time basis. Additionally, Faculties should have mature/part-time testimonies (written or web-streamed) on the web. Success stories should be shared and celebrated. The expected time to complete a degree in the evening should be explicit.

York magazines/newsletters, in print and online, should have a permanent mature/part-time feature. Students should be encouraged to share their experiences/stories.

Unique Identifier for Evening Students

Evening students would benefit from having a unique identifier which would enable them to receive discounted parking, priority access to evening courses, evening appointments, etc. The identifier could be similar to that utilized by part-time/full-time graduate students.

The commitment could ensure evening students could register for 6 credits by a certain date. Thereafter, restrictions can be lifted. This strategy would give York a competitive edge over University of Toronto and Ryerson University.

Mature/part-time Student Union

In regards to the student levy, students should choose where they would like their levy to go; i.e., Mature/Part-time Student Union or York Federation of Students.

Satellite Campuses

York may benefit from having satellite campuses in Durham and surrounding areas. At these satellite campuses, students can write exams, attend classes and submit course work.

COURSES

Course Offerings

To prevent students from procrastinating, online courses may benefit from having a mixed model; i.e., students attend class and complete work online. Similarly, professors may choose to video tape themselves lecturing to the class and then post the video online. This helps students review their notes and is beneficial prior to exams.

Generally, more courses should be available in the evening and in the modalities of internet and Distance Education. The 4 to 7pm timeslot does not work. Courses that start at 4 pm are not conducive to those who work the standard day shift (9 am to 5 pm). The earliest a class may start is 6:30 pm. Students enrolled in courses, which commence at 4 pm had made special arrangements with their employers such as stretching sick/vacation leave over the span of an academic term. This resolution decreases one's sick/vacation allotment.

Some students cannot complete their degree in the timeframe that they would like. There should be a variety of courses offered in the evening and on different days, thus providing students with options. Moreover, 9-credit courses should be available in the evening. Course requirements should be available in the evening. Course restrictions should be explained when a student is unable to register into a class.

A variety of courses should be available in the evening and online.

It was noted that day students enrol into evening classes because the day classes fill-up quickly. Upper level courses (3000 and 4000) should be offered in the evenings. Popular courses should have more sections to accommodate non-majors.

I find it difficult to find day-time electives so I have no choice but taking evening classes at Schulich (MBA). More electives should be offered in downtown Nadal campus.

Distance Education courses

To combat the availability of space, York can offer more courses/degrees online. Those who work may prefer the flexibility of online courses/degrees. Programs, documents and applications pertaining to online courses should be Mac and Windows compatible.

Technical services are unavailable in the evenings/weekends. Considering online classes are held on weekends, services should be operating.

Generally, more courses should be available in the modalities of internet and Distance Education.

Office of Computing Technology and E-Learning Services

The Office is open until 7 pm, Monday to Thursday and desktop help is available until 6 pm. Additionally students can utilize a 1-800 number when calling long distance.

Computer labs are available in TEL and HNES. Lab monitors are available onsite until 10 pm.

The website is thorough and detailed and includes course websites for every course, every term. At the moment, two full degrees and a certificate are available online.

Summer course offerings

Over the summer months, more courses should be offered, especially in the evening (7 to 10 pm). Some students cannot complete their degree in the timeframe that they would like.

More tutorials should be available during the summer months.

Required courses for program completion

Students complain about not getting into courses. Degrees should allow flexibility by encouraging students to take 3 or 4 out of 5 courses from a certain level/area; as opposed to specifying that a specific course must be taken.

Courses should be varied and offered in all three terms, day and evening and via internet/correspondence. Students who can only come in the evening are finding seats taken by day time students.

Course Outlines and Descriptions

Course descriptions should be more specific and should accurately reflect the material taught in the course. Course syllabi should be posted in advance of the first class and should be regularly maintained.

Course Websites

Maintaining and updating course websites eliminates or drastically reduces the number of emails from students.

Course websites should be serviced regularly. Also tutorials, useful style guides should be posted on course websites. An up-to-date course website can reduce the number of redundant emails.

Course websites can be dynamic; e.g., posting Frequently Asked Questions, essay style guide, program/departmental initiatives, helpful web links etc.

Course Work

There should be flexibility with participation marks. Students may not be able to attend every class and thus should not be policed nor penalized. The challenges that students face; e.g., working shift work/full-time hours, etc need to be addressed and acknowledged at the start of the semester. It would be helpful for the professor to recognize the diversity of the class. It is imperative to mention that students may have disabilities and the class should be respectful of needs. Senate should put forth a policy on accommodating students.

Due dates of assignments should be flexible for student who have legitimate reasons for wanting extensions or requiring permission to submit an assignment via fax or email.

Weighting of mid-term marks should not automatically be shifted to the final exam without giving the student the option to write a make-up midterm exam. Professors should prepare alternative tests.

Exams

Exams should parallel class day and time. The exam schedule should be posted when the course schedule is available.

Course Financial Drop deadline

Financial drop deadline dates occur early in the course. By these dates, students may have only had one class, this is not enough time to make an informed decision to drop or stay in the course.

Classroom Etiquette

Students are encouraged to talk during breaks or before/after class; as opposed to talking in class. In class, students should not be chatting online/visiting websites nor should cell phone be ringing. It is the persistent interruption and disruption of cell phones and laptops in the class that hinders learning. Instructors, Teaching Assistants or professors, should utilize strategies to minimize idle chatter during the lectures/tutorials.

ADVISING SERVICES

Transfer Credits

Students should be made aware of which prior courses counted as York credits. There should be an explicit and transparent policy on transfer credits.

Advising

The wait time for academic advising is too long. Advising Offices should accept walk in appointments. Advising appointments should be available until 6 or 6:30 pm. Students who work during the day may call during their lunch hour/break, these people cannot afford to be on hold for an hour. It is nice to book appointments online; however, those spots get filled quickly.

Advising for Mature Students

Mature students should be invited to a meet and greet with faculty members. Faculty members who were mature students during their years of study, should be encouraged to mingle with incoming mature students. Advising and orientation sessions for mature students should highlight services and relevant information. Workshop tailored to the needs of mature students should be offered.

Faculty Members Office Hours

Faculty should have office hours prior to class commencing. Secondly, if Glendon professors are to teach at the Keele Campus, perhaps they can hold office hours at the Keele Campus and vice versa. Professors should be accessible by email, telephone or in person. Faculty members and offices need to share knowledge. More importantly, professors need to be aware of services, policies, deadline, and procedures at York.

ACADEMIC/SOCIAL SUPPORT PROGRAMS

Networking

Professors/departments should provide opportunities for students to come together and get to know each other.

Program/Department Workshops

Workshops offered by a Program or Department should have day, evening and weekend sessions. Moreover, workshops should appeal to mature students. Workshops can be tailored or themed to suit the needs of participants.

Workshops conducted by people in the field and which shed light on the nuances of being a mature student appeal to that specific population. Workshops, tutorials, information sessions should be video taped and posted online thereby making information accessible to all.

Essay writing workshops help students who have been out of school to relearn their skills. These particular workshops welcome mature students by understanding some of the challenges a student may encounter.

For clubs and organizations, mature and part-time students have various needs. Nonetheless, if clubs and organizations had affiliations with professional bodies, more students would participate.

Clubs/Organizations

Younger students felt that social events in the evening/on weekends will decrease the prejudice that York University is a commuter school. In general, events help develop leadership skills and foster relations among colleagues. On weekends the campus is dissolute and by having events over the weekend will make the campus a safer place because people will be around. On the other hand, older students were not interested in participating on clubs and councils. Older students are career driven and strategically decide how they spend their free time. These students are interested in liaising with professional bodies which will enable them to network with professionals in the field.

Peer Mentorship

STARS has a fantastic group which pairs current students with alumni and professionals. Through this program both parties share experiences and learn from one another.

Catering to Community

York University should service the surrounding community by inviting prospective students onto the campus and building relations between current and incoming students. York should look to the needs of the community and keep pace with needs; e.g., encouraging and recruiting people who need Canadian credentials.

Quiet Time

Having a designated study area would foster productivity.

Some universities offer a "quiet hour" during which classes are ceased. This hour allows for students to get together and do group work, relax, study, etc. Although, establishing a "quiet hour" could be challenging for York; nonetheless, York could have two "quiet hours" one in the day and the other in the evening.

Dedicated building

A building dedicated to evening and weekend students could foster a sense of community for students. Community can be developed by having classrooms and administrative office in the same building/same floor. Security and custodial could thoroughly service one building. Additionally, eateries could operate to serve students.

UNIVERSITY ADMINISTRATIVE SUPPORT SERVICES

University Wide Commitment

To conduct services in-person in the evening/ on the weekend should be a pan-University principle.

Centralized Service Hub

When students are on campus they would benefit from a Centralized Service Hub, which would tell them where to go. This Hub should also have computers, printers and photocopy machines.

Administrative Services

Administrators should be aware of services and offices on campus. Offices should be open until 7 or 8 pm. All too often, students get bounced around and receive different answers from different departments. Information and processes should be transparent and thoroughly

explained to students. If documents need to be picked up and are not confidential, arrangements are made with a nearby office which is open later.

Student Client Services

The building is open 24 hours/ 7 days a week to access the drop-off boxes for Admissions, Registrarial and Financial Services.

The wait times during the hours of 10 to 4 are exceptionally long and it is no better if you visit the office in person. For telecommunication services, students should have the option of leaving a message or receiving a call back when the line is available; students should not be put on hold for hours. Individuals calling long distance should be able to bypass local callers.

Student Client Services (SCS) has extended hours until 5:30 pm during the months of September and January. SCS is looking into lengthening hours of operation, especially on Wednesday and Thursday. Students can request appointments and avoid waiting in line. The latest appointment is 5:30 pm.

During OSAP loan distribution, personals from Financial Services and OSAP are available onsite to answer questions. We have satellite locations for loan distribution, at which the average wait time is 5 to 10 minutes.

Information pertaining to the arrival of loan documents, bill payments, tax forms, etc. is available on our website.

Action History, a module to track student inquiries/request is utilized to communicate with Registrarial and Financial Services. SCS is interested in connecting with various groups on campus and giving Faculties access to Action History.

A calendar of events has been developed to communicate with students. Additional messages are communicated via Passport York Notes.

Registrarial/Financial Services

Registrar and Financial Services should be open at least once a week until 7 or 8 pm. Additionally, the phone lines, to communicate with a Service Representative, should be open until 7 or 8 pm. Staff lunches should be staggered to help with peak periods of volume. When students are on hold, perhaps they can listen to events occurring at York or to a "how to" tutorial.

The request to operate Registrar and Financial Services well into the evening and weekends is unsustainable due to the paperwork and behind the scenes work.

The Office of the Registrar has staff available in the evening and weekends during the exam schedule to help troubleshoot. When scheduling exams for evening classes, careful consideration is given to have evening classes write in the evening. The Alternative Test Centre operates all week and accommodates the needs of students.

The Frequently Asked Questions module and Ask a Student Service Representation answers questions in a dynamic manner. Both Registrar and Financial Services websites are comprehensive.

The development of a Student Portal is currently underway. In this portal, students will be able to complete degree audits to ensure they are on track to completing their degree. Surveys and focus groups are helping to develop the services that should be included in the Portal.

24/04/2009

A Student Advisory Group evaluates the effectiveness of policies and procedures from the perspective of a student. Students are involved and facilitate the decision making process.

To communicate with students, packages are mailed to home addresses, notes via Passport York is utilized along with posters and brochures. To disseminate information to Faculties Registrarial roundtables are held.

Student Financial Services

Most of our information is available on the website. Students who need special care are encouraged to make appointments. Students are encouraged to call, fax or email if they are unable to visit.

The Financial Office is aware of the lack of financial support for mature/part-time students. The Office advocates for additional funding and encourages donors to contribute to mature student scholarships/prizes/bursaries.

Awards/Bursaries

If forms are available online, then students should be able to complete and submit the forms online. Secondly, when submitting forms in person or by fax, students are not notified if their request has been accepted, is under view, granted or denied. For example, for the Student Financial Bursary, students are unaware if they qualify for an award/scholarship or bursary.

Awards and bursaries seem to cater to full-time students (eligible criteria). The Financial Profile is not user friendly.

Additional awards/bursaries/scholarships are needed for mature/part-time students. Forms requiring financial information should not consider mortgages, RRSP, credit card limits as disposable assets. Forms requiring financial information should account for mortgages, RRSP, and other categories which apply to mature students. Some forms consider credit card limits as cash.

If two awards/bursaries/scholarships are to be given out, encourage Units/Divisions/Schools to give distribute the monies between a full-time/day student and part-time/evening student.

Library

Scott library tends to be busy, whereas the other libraries have peak/low periods. Professors should be encouraged to have course books on reserve at the larger libraries.

Library Services have come a long way and having Scott library open until 1am allows students a safe place to study. Information desks should be located on each floor, not solely the second floor.

Although students request that the library be open 24 hours, it is more of a security than staffing issue.

Students have requested that the research/reference helpdesk operate until 8 or 10 pm.

Routine circulation is open 24 hours / 7 days a week. Additionally the larger libraries are open until 11 pm during the week. Since September, the first floor of Scott library has been operating until 1 pm, Sunday to Thursday. In person, reference and research help is available until 8 pm. During exams, library hours are amended to cater to the needs of students. This provides a safe study space and access to computers. Drop-in workshops are scheduled in the evenings and on Saturdays.

Students with disabilities can arrange to meet with staff from 8am to 8 pm, Monday to Thursday. Students with special needs are able to access the adaptive labs.

When returning material, students can utilize various drop boxes located around the campus. Inter-library loans can be picked-up by request.

The website is robust, containing e-resources, a virtual help desk, streaming of music, etc. The library has not packaged information online.

Tail McKenzie

Hours should be extended beyond 10 PM.

Bookstore

The Bookstore should have extended hours (past 10 pm) during the first few weeks of class.

Centre for Student Community and Leadership Development

Students have expressed concern regarding equal representation on student groups/government. At the moment the Atkinson Student Association represents the needs of mature/part-time/evening program; however, York Federation of Students will represent the needs of all York Students.

From a student life perspective, students do not participate in events.

The Office is open until 4:30; however, appointments can be booked until 5:30 pm.

Career Centre

The Career Centre does a good job of posting videos online. Although the Career Centre has information and tutorials posted online, students would like to visit the Centre to reference material or to meet with representatives.

Online Information and Services

Packaging of Online Services - The University website is vast. Services, forms, etc. can be packaged for easy navigation.

E-mail - There is a lag from when an email is sent to when it is received by web-mail. Additionally, Web-mail has a tendency to lose emails. Students should have an email address to which they can email any question and get an answer within 3 days. Such a service would prevent students from visiting the campus and making appointments.

Online forms - Considering forms are available online, students should be able to complete the information and submit the form online, rather than printing out the form and mailing/faxing/delivering it. Having access to submit forms online can negate the need to wait in line; however, finding forms can take a while. Forms should have additional notes, so that students know what information is required. Moreover, when a request has to be submitted, it takes a while to receive a response.

Website/Search Option - Websites need to be updated and maintained. Additionally, the Search option needs to be refined to generate relevant results. The "search" options does not yield pertinent information.

Online Information should also be visual; e.g., pod-casting or a "how to" video which would visually explain what a student is expected to do. This will appeal to the auditory and visual learners.

Online Portal - Students may benefit from an online portal which compartmentalizes information. Also on the portal there should be an Events Calendar which would inform students of upcoming events/workshops.

Degree audits should be electronic and made available to students.

Daycare

The Daycare served evening students during the early to mid 1990s. At present, the Daycare has a two year wait list and has to obtain a license to operate in the evening. The Daycare will discuss the prospect of applying for a license and continuing to provide services in the evening with the Board of Directors.

Consider re-opening child care services for evening students and operating the Centre on Sundays during the exam period. Re-institutionalize a governmental child-care bursary for mature/part-time students. Provide care for infants (newborn to 18 months of age).

Child care services should be operational in the evening and weekends. Emergency care should also be available when students are writing re-scheduled exams.

TRANSPORTATION/PARKING SERVICES

Bus Services

Bus service should run frequently and be readily available in the evening and on weekends.

Transportation, especially the 60 Steels, 41 Keele and Go Buses need to improve services in the evening and on weekends. The frequency of 196 Downsview is appreciated by students.

Commute from downtown Toronto to Keele campus is a headache for weekend classes. TTC bus (express bus from Downsview) is NOT in service during weekends.

Parking

Part-time students should only have to pay part-time parking fees. Meters should be adjusted such that evening students are not paying full-day rates.

SECURITY/LIGHTING

Security/Lighting

Services such as Go Safe and Walk Safe are not reliable. The wait time can be anywhere from 20 minutes to an hour. Students rather walk with classmates to parking garages/lots. Furthermore, Go Safe has particular routes, which may not suit the needs of riders. GO Safe does not promote safety. Go Safe could run more frequently, especially on Thursday evenings

Security Officers should be walking around campus and monitoring unusual behaviour.

All walkways require luminous lighting; i.e., halogen.

It was recommended that students sign up for the escort service/Go Safe program at the start of each semester.

Security Officers should be walking around make their presence known. Similarly, officers should patrol the perimeters of the campus and parking lots.

24/04/2009

The lack of safety does not lead to a positive experience. Some students are deterred from taking evening classes due to poor lighting, lack of security and unreliable services.

In terms of improvement, escort services have to respond quickly; flood or sensory lights are required around parking lots/walkways, followed by an increased presence of security personnel.

It is very dark at nights on Ian McDonald road. I don't feel safe walking to the bus stop nearby the Seneca College building.

FACILITIES

Classroom Facilities

Rooms should be large enough to seat the number of students enrolled in a particular course. Additionally, lecterns should be available in all rooms. Within classrooms seats should be comfortable. Seats made from recycled material will further York's goal to be environmentally conscious.

If rooms are rented in the evening/weekend the room should be configured to its original seating arrangement.

Rooms may benefit from a light cleaning around 6 pm and more thoroughly at 10 pm.

Facilities/Security should be present on weekends to open locked room or to adjust the temperature. Similarly, custodial services should be on hand.

Eateries

Eateries should be open on weekends. An eatery/cafeteria should be established in Kinsmen. Eateries should parallel library hours to ensure students have the opportunity to obtain beverages/nourishment.

Washroom Facilities

Equip washrooms with change tables and designate an area where mothers can breastfeed. Create family washrooms. For hygienic purposes, rooms should be cleaned around 6 pm and more thoroughly at 10 pm

Seating

More seating should be available. A lot of students sit on the floor either to eat, study, or wait for a class to end.

External Facilities

Walk ways need to be cleared and salted in a timely manner.